

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE HISTORICAL DISTRICT OF CLUJ

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1 Introduction

Since 1989 Romania has been facing a new phase of societal development, which is often called ‘transition’. It includes processes of transition from a planned economy and single-party system to a democratic and market-economy-based regime. At the same time, 1989 was the beginning of the stepwise integration of the Romanian economy into the global networks of production and consumption and the Euro-Atlantic integration of the country. Under these political and economic conditions one should expect a shift in the territorial planning and development policy of the country from the national level to the regional and local level. The latter functions as the level of the implementation of local policies based on the concept of sustainable development; therefore there is an increasing interest for discussing this topic in Romania as well. In this paper we will examine how the above-mentioned macro-structural changes are reflected on the level of the historical urban districts, the analysis focusing as a case study on the city of Cluj.

2 Historical development of the city until 1947

Cluj is a medium-sized city (with about 310,000 inhabitants at the last census, in 2002) by European standards and the third largest city in Romania (after Bucharest and Iasi). It is situated in the north-western part of the country, in the historical province of Transylvania. The first documentary attestation of Cluj dates back to 1213, but it received city (*civitas*) status only in 1316. An important year in the history of Cluj was 1405, when it obtained the right to build walls around the city. This fact has led to the development of the presently known inner city or historical district (45 ha), erected almost entirely inside the medieval walls. During the Middle Ages the city gained the appellation “treasury” [“*kincses*”] as a sign of its wealth due to the presence of large number of successful craftsmen and tradesmen. The development of Cluj became faster after 1790, when it regained its administrative function as the centre of the Austrian province of Transylvania. After the establishment of the university in 1872 it also became the

intellectual capital of Transylvania. Its historical district is closely related to this period of time: the actual historical centre was shaped geometrically during the 14th and 15th centuries, and the current building stock mainly dates back to the urban development in the 19th century.

Industrialisation starting in the second half of the 19th century had little direct influence on the historical district. Modern industrial development resulted in the spatially selective growth of the town during the 19th century, when, as a result of the first stage of industrialisation, the territorial development of Cluj was east-west oriented, expanding the historical district by new residential areas and industrial zones. In this period Cluj incorporated the village of Mănăştur [Monostor] in 1894, situated west to the city centre, while the second and last incorporation occurred during the socialist industrialisation, when the village of Someşeni [Szamosfalva] became part of the city in 1952. In the socialist period Cluj missed the opportunity to incorporate other surrounding villages, which contributed to the relatively high prices of land and dwellings after 1989.

3 The status of the inner city (historical district) during state-socialism

During the last half century the urban development of Cluj was marked decisively by two groups of factors: the historical development path, presented above, and the state socialist political and economic system existing from 1947 to 1989. The socialist period (1947–1989) created a specific spatial structure, which was significantly different from the spatial structure of the cities of Western Europe, but similar to the pattern of Central Eastern European cities. This was the consequence of the regulation system maintained by the state. The essence of socialist urban growth is reflected by the low level of urbanism due to the high speed and short period of urbanisation and to the low social integration capacities of the targeted cities (Csedő et al. 2003). During this period the state became the major actor of the development of Cluj. Its outstanding role has been further intensified by the nationalisation of the dwelling and land stock. Therefore the role of the market in shaping the structure of the city became negligible. This general picture was different in the inner city of Cluj, because certain buildings were kept in the administration of the church (mainly the Roman Catholic Church). In other words, the influence of the state on the housing market was not so dominant in the historical district, and it was exercised mainly through the distribution of existing dwellings. Generally, as a consequence of the nationalisation process, property and rent prices were kept at a low level by the socialist state.

In this period, although Cluj maintained its traditionally strong service functions, as a result of intense industrialisation the importance of the service sector declined, while industry grew rapidly (*Molnár et al. 1962, Susan, 1973*). The rationalisation of public services led to the relative decline of the quality of the service sector, especially in the case of household-oriented services.

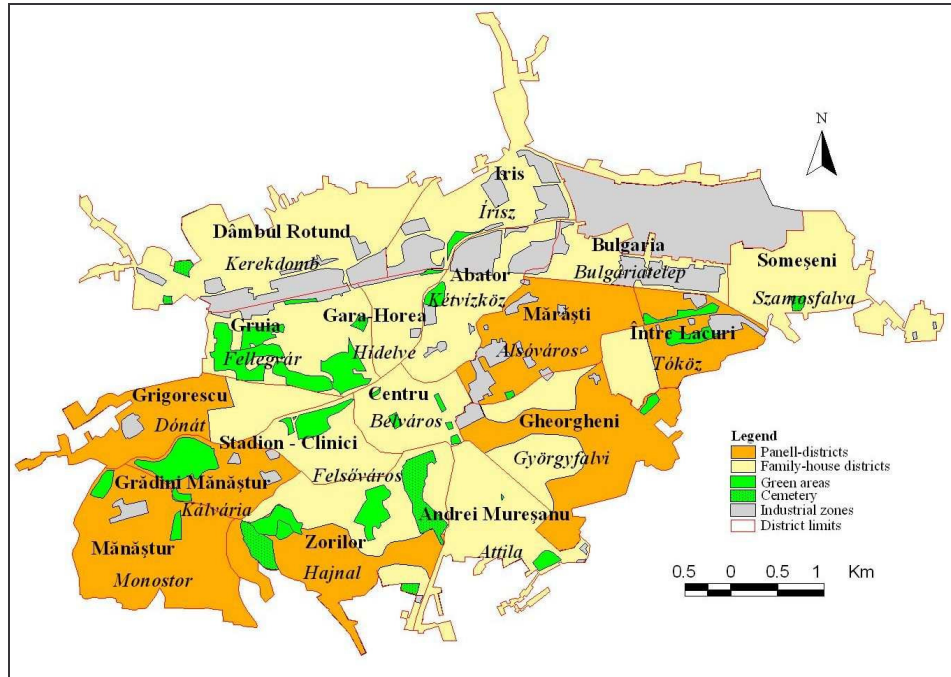
A specific feature of Romanian socialism was – in contradiction to other Central and Eastern European countries – that the main instrument of urban development was not the City Development Plan (Master Plan). During state socialism it simply did not exist. The locational decisions with regard to residential and industrial areas were made at the political level of the county.

The most important elements of socialist urban planning in Cluj are the five pre-fab housing estates built from the beginning of the 1950s, which concentrate a large part of the population in high-rise, standardised buildings. These are: Gheorgheni [Györgyfalva], Grigorescu [Dónáth], Mănăştur [Monostor], Mărăşti [Hősök tere] and Zorilor [Hajnal] (*Figure 1*). With small distances between the buildings these estates retain a high density of dwellings and population, reaching record values of 300–400 inhabitants/ha in Mănăştur. A consequence of the intensive socialist urban development was that the traditional sectoral city-model of Cluj was replaced by a multi-centre model, where the central places of the new pre-fab districts took over significant service functions.

Another result of the socialist urban development was the low level of residential segregation. The situation was again different in the historical district, which was not a prime target of immigration for industrial workers, and therefore it maintained its distinctive social feature as a mixed functional area, where the residents had either longer urban roots or were intellectual immigrants loyal to the communist party and employed in sectors like the administration, education or health care (*Surd-Ipatiov, 1993*).

The socialist concept of urban development devoted an important role to the inner city; it was designated as the centre of political power and representation. The political, administrative, educational, medical and cultural functions were concentrated here. In each county seat central squares were designated as places of socialist power wielding. As an opposite to this general picture, in Cluj the representative place of socialist power was located outside the historical district: at Lucian Blaga Square [Szent György tér], where a range of urbanistic changes were undertaken in 1961–62 with this goal. The square was geometrically regulated, its size was increased, a new building was raised in the fashion of socialist realism (the Student House), the square was renamed (Păcii or Peace Square), and the Saint George statue (the copy of the original made in 1373, located in Prague) was moved to Kogălniceanu [Farkas] Street (*Asztalos, 2004*).

FIGURE 1
The functional structure of Cluj



Source: Author's design.

The socialist urban development had little morphological influence on the historical district. The socialist technocratic planning influenced the housing stock of the historical district to a limited extent, creating some new residential buildings, but without affecting the population density of the historical district. Even functionally little changed, only the intensity of the commercial use of buildings fell during state socialism, and there was no sign of suburbanisation, meaning that the historical districts still remained relatively densely inhabited. The private commercial units – concentrated in the inner city – were also nationalised and reorganised in the form of socialist cooperatives, operating with a lower number of units, monopolising the household-oriented services. In the same period an uneven relationship between the new pre-fab residential areas and the inner city developed, which caused an important problem: there was no effort to adapt the transport infrastructure to the quickly growing residential areas. As a result, all major transport axes had to cross the inner city in order to bring the white- and blue-collar workers from the random residential areas to the

workplaces concentrated in the inner city and in the industrial areas. This situation created a wide range of transport, infrastructural and service-delivery dysfunctions.

4 Urban transformation after 1989

After the change of regime in 1989 the direction and intensity of the territorial restructuring and urban development was determined by the following factors:

- political democratisation (stronger local power over the development path and more space for local initiatives);
- intensive globalisation of the local economy;
- privatisation of state companies and of the public housing and land stock, putting the market forces forward in the urban spatial processes;
- European integration of the country;
- deindustrialization;
- structural transformation of the industry;
- general decline of employment.

Since 1989 the importance and the decision-making power of the local administrative level has increased; and in addition, an increasing competition between the local administrations for capital investments could be observed. Cluj has reacted to the new political and economic situation in accordance with its capabilities, competitiveness and development of its institutional network. Besides the above-mentioned external structural factors, the development path of Cluj has been determined by a range of local factors. During the first ten years of the transition the city was not discovered by large international investors, due to the nationalistic behaviour of the local administration. Local governments can exercise a huge influence on investors due to the fact that firms wanting to invest have to obtain the permission of the local authority in order to establish a new economic unit in the town. This permission was not issued for many potential investors in Cluj, which was rather irrational from an economic point of view.

Act No. 215/2001 on Local Public Administrations has given a range of important competences to the local authorities (the local council as deliberative authority, and the mayor as executive authority) in order to establish the development path which is considered to be the most adequate for the local community. For example the local councils have the following powers (Art. 38):

- Approval of studies, prognoses and programmes of socio-economic development, of territorial planning and town planning;
- Establishment of taxes and local fees, as well as special fees;
- Management of the public and the private domains of the town;

- Set-up of public institutions, trading companies and public services of local interest;
- Contribution to the protection, conservation, restoration and turning to good account of historical and architectural monuments.

TABLE 1
Basic indicators of the residential areas of Cluj, 2000

Nr.	Residential district	Population	%	Surface (ha)	%	Housing surface (ha)
1.	Baciu [Kisbács]	1,345	0.4	47.4	1.6	33.1
2.	Bună Ziua [“Jó napot”]	–	–	320.6	10.6	85.6
3.	Inner City	26,710	8.1	341.1	11.3	226.4
4.	Dâmbul Rotund [Kerekdomb]	8,258	2.5	223	7.4	148.1
5.	Gheorgheni [Györgyfalva]	43,375	13.2	144.1	4.8	121.3
6.	Grigorescu [Dónáth]	26,435	8	164.9	5.5	140.4
7.	Gruia [Fellegvár]	7,301	2.2	101.9	3.4	85.1
8.	Zona industrială [Ipari negyed]	4,590	1.4	92.6	3.1	63.2
9.	Iris [Irisz]	7,432	2.3	132.8	4.4	101.1
10.	Mănăstur [Monostor]	83,324	25.3	225.6	7.5	164.9
11.	Mărăști [Hősök tere]	43,570	13.2	186.7	6.2	142.2
12.	Andrei Mureșanu [Tisztviselőtelep]	9,265	2.8	159.7	5.3	139.8
13.	Oașului [Avas]	621	0.2	71.1	2.4	52.3
14.	Plopilor [Nyárfasor]	6,515	1.2	26.22	0.9	20.7
15.	Someșeni [Szamosfalva]	4,108	1.2	177.8	5.9	144.6
16.	Aurel Vlaicu	30,790	9.4	121.5	4	92.4
17.	Zorilor [Hajnal]	25,072	7.6	146.8	4.9	125.4
18.	Colonia Făget [Bükk-telep]	268	0.1	333.6	11.1	149
Total		328,898	100.0	3,017.9	100.0	2,035.5

Source: Local Council of Cluj (2000).

The physical condition of buildings in the historical district deteriorated during this period. The situation changed after 2000, when the local elections from 2000 and especially from 2004 brought new forces to the leading positions. The new situation proved to be favourable for the opening up and international integration of the local economy.

Under these circumstances in the spring of 2005 the first large-scale public debate was started about the conservation strategy of the historical district. During this debate the following problems were identified to be faced in the conser-

vation process: aesthetic pollution of the public space, illegal transformations of protected buildings and especially the intense car traffic.

In addition to this political process, the geographical position of the city has become more influential in urban development. Increasing regional differentiation has brought Cluj some comparative advantages, despite the above-mentioned political obstacles at the beginning. In this process a crucial role was played by the non-profit sphere, represented in Cluj by a large number of high-ranked services: public administration, education and health care. Only the higher education institutions bring 80,000 students each year to Cluj. Other comparative advantages are represented by the good accessibility of the town (international airport, European road E60, railway junction, the planned Transylvania highway), the size of the local demand (400,000 consumers), the spillover effects resulting from the activities of universities (e.g. in the field of research and development).

The social transformation of the city has followed the economic changes and it has been marked by growing unemployment, increasing impoverishment of certain groups (e.g. Roma, pensioners), and the rise of a new middle- and upper-middle class. On the one hand, the new social stratification and the liberalisation of the housing market has had important spatial effects: new residential areas have been developed for the middle- and upper-middle class, while the housing market has also been characterised by the filtering-down process of marginalised groups both from the higher prestige districts and from the bigger and more comfortable dwellings into lower prestige areas and dwellings of smaller size and less comfort. On the other hand some groups have profited from the new situation. During state-socialism dwellings were owned predominantly (75 percent) by the state. After 1989 the state started to privatise the public housing stock under extremely favourable conditions for the tenants, empowering a large number of people. At present 95 percent of the housing stock is in private ownership in Cluj and it forms an important basis for capital accumulation, due to the fact that the large number of students in the city makes letting activity very profitable. This kind of business forms an important source of income for local people. An important consequence of the increasing demand for housing was the growth and differentiation of property and renting prices. Property prices range between 17,000 EUR (one-room dwelling with poor facilities) and 55,000 EUR (four-room dwellings) for pre-fab buildings and even more for new ones, while rent ranges between 50 and 150 EUR for one room per month.

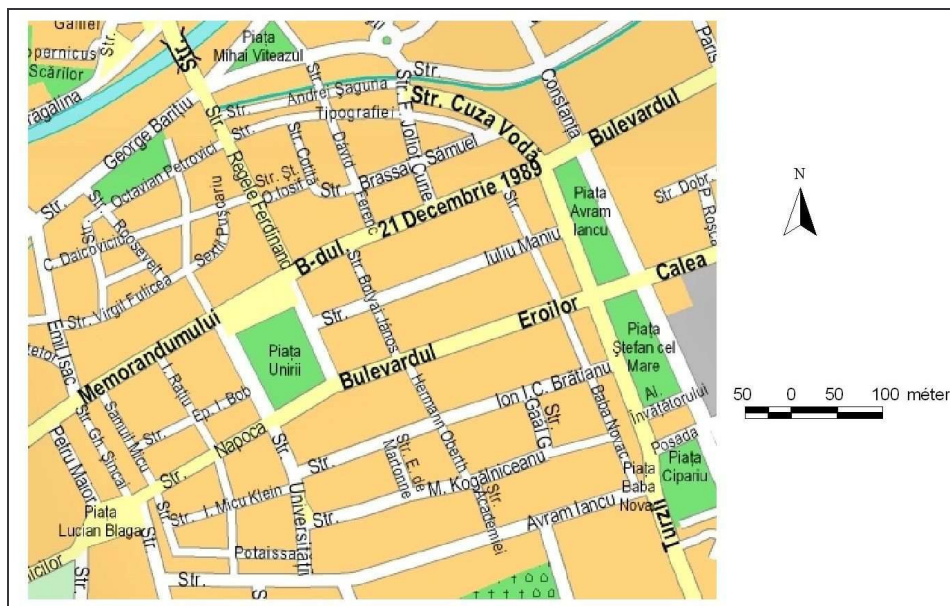
5 The inner city during the post-socialist transition

Cluj presents some specific conditions of urban development that determine problems and solutions for the sustainable development of the historical city centre. There are some *specific features* of the present-day transformation process in the city centre (as compared to Western Europe and North America) which determines the specificity of Cluj. They are the subject of analysis in the following sections.

The inner city of Cluj contains three structural elements (*Figure 2*):

- the old city core (Piața Muzeului/Óvár);
- five squares: Unirii/Főtér, Mihai Viteazu/Széchenyi, Avram Iancu/Bocskai, Ștefan cel Mare/Hunyadi, and Lucian Blaga/Szent György Squares;
- the connecting streets (B-dul 21 decembrie 1989/Magyar; Regele Ferdinand/Híd; Iuliu Maniu/Szentegyház; B-dul Eroilor/Belső-Közép; I. C. Brătianu/Király; Kogălniceanu/Farkas etc.).

FIGURE 2
The inner-city of Cluj



Source: City map.

The inner city can be divided into two areas from architectural and functional point of view:

a) On the *Central Square* (Unirii/Fötér) a multifunctional place evolved during the Middle Ages, which had residential as well as religious and political functions. The market of the city was also located here until the end of the 19th century. Accordingly, until that period the place was known by the name 'Grand Market' [Nagypiac]. In the 19th century the place was stepwise transformed into a representative square. The beginning moment was the visit of the Habsburg Emperor Franz I and his wife Carolina Augusta in the year 1817. To commemorate this visit, the city established a monument in 1831, the Carolina statue, located at Central Square. However, the real turning point in the development of this place into a representative square was the beginning of the Millennium ceremonies of the Hungarian state in 1896. That year the market was moved to Mihai Viteazu [Széchenyi] Square, the building-ring which surrounded the Saint Michael Church was demolished, the Carolina statue was moved to Museum [Óvár] Square. These measures of the local administration were followed by the inauguration of the main symbolic element of the square, the Mátyás statue group in 1902. At the beginning of the 20th century the last representative buildings of the square, the 'Status Houses', which determine the actual morphological and urbanistic structure of the square, were constructed. In the logic of Funarian nationalism (i.e. that of G. Funar, the Mayor of Cluj after 1989) the Central Square became a place of important changes and symbolic redefinitions: the placement of a memorial tablet on the Mátyás statue group, suggesting the Romanian origin of King Mátyás [Mathias Corvinus]; the inauguration of the monument of the 'Memorandiștilor'; the start of the foundation of the Traianus statue, intended to be finished later; the excavation of the archaeological ditch; the painting of different objects with the national colours of Romania: benches, waste-baskets, lamps etc., not to speak about the great number of national flags put out in the square.

The buildings of the Central Square and its neighbourhood belong to different architectural styles beginning with the Gothic of the 15th century and ranging to the Secession style of the first decade of the 20th century. The buildings of the late Eclectic and Classicist styles are dominant, but the most pregnant and precious buildings are the Gothic-style St. Michael Church (built in the 14–15th centuries) and the Baroque-style Bánffy Palace (1774–1786). The houses of the Central Square (34) are mostly two- or three-storey, while in the neighbouring streets single-storey houses are dominant. Generally they are in a bad physical condition, with the exception of the ones used by public institutions, the church and private companies, such as banks. The symbols of this area are products of

the Hungarian and German cultures, and they represent highly appreciated objects of identification for a large portion of the population in Cluj.

b) The second area is situated in the eastern part of the inner city, located around Mihai Viteazu/Széchenyi Square, Avram Iancu/Bocskai Square, and Ștefan cel Mare/Hunyadi Square. The latter two squares were developed in the second part of the 19th century, outside the city wall. At the beginning of the 20th century this area was divided into two parts. The southern part comprises Hunyadi square (today Ștefan cel Mare) with distinctive elements of the Romanian Theatre and Opera (built by Fellner and Helmer in 1904–1906) and the Palace of Justice (1900–1902). In the northern part Bocskai or EMKE Square (today called Avram Iancu) gives place for the former EMKE (the Hungarian Cultural Association from Transylvania) Palace (1890–91) as the central element (today the centre of the Romanian Railways). Other highly symbolic elements evolved later: the Orthodox Cathedral (1923–33) and the Avram Iancu statue group (1993). With the development of this urbanistic complex the inner city was reshaped and became a typical two-pole structure. One pole is formed by the Central Square, mainly bound to Hungarian symbols; the other one is constituted by the Avram Iancu and Ștefan cel Mare Squares, with overwhelmingly Romanian symbols. This structure is reinforced by the parallel street-system, which connects the two poles.

Mihai Viteazu (Széchenyi) Square was also developed outside the city wall, but earlier compared to the Avram Iancu and Ștefan cel Mare complex. The square had functioned as the central market place until 1945. During state-socialism it was transformed into a representative place, which included the construction of a high-rise building in the Socialist-Realist style ('Republica') and the monumental Mihai Viteazu statue (1976).

Today a growing number of new buildings (raised after 1989) is characteristic of this area, which serve for the banking and hotel sector and huge constructions that house public institutions (County Council, Protestant Theology, Orthodox Theology, Romanian Railways, Financial Office, Palace of Justice etc.). At the same time this area was filled with Romanian architectural and cultural symbols between 1920 and 1945, and also after 1989, as already mentioned above, constituting spaces of identification for the Romanian population.

Characteristic of this area is the decline of the residential function, concomitant with the continuous diffusion of the service sector. The service sector includes a huge number of schools (the best ones in the city), universities (nine altogether), museums, churches, banks, offices, commercial units etc. As a consequence of the high density of buildings green spaces are almost totally missing in the area.

The social, economic and political changes mentioned in the previous section have influenced the post-socialist transformation of the internal spatial structure of the city – and especially the inner-city – in many ways:

1) The transformation has strongly affected the *ethnic structure* of the city, which has become more homogenised in the sense that the share of Romanians has constantly grown (*Table 2*). At the same time, the share of Hungarians has decreased, while the Jewish population, once very influential, has almost disappeared from the ethnic structure of the city. Based on the local elections database from 1996 and 2004 we could detect a share of Hungarian population on a very low level. Using the standard deviation values (the distance from the mean value of 19 percent Hungarians on city level in 2002), Hungarians are segregated in four areas (standard deviation of 2 or 3): firstly the inner-city election district, secondly a little district close to the historical district (Gruia/Fellegvár), a third district located along Paris Street, and finally the Bulgaria residential area, the last two areas inhabited mainly by blue-collar workers. Other positive deviation values (1–2) could be localised in all other election districts of the inner city, in five residential areas around the historical district and in one district situated in the southern part of the residential area Gheorgheni [Györgyfalva]. It must be mentioned that all these areas were not involved in the pre-fab housing development during socialism, while strong negative deviation values (minus 2 and 3) are dominant in the high-rise pre-fab housing estates developed during state-socialism.

Hungarians are still overrepresented (in statistical terms) in the historical district. From the point of view of this analysis it is important to note that district, therefore they should play an important role in the local conservation strategy, and, as a consequence, in the design process of a socially sustainable urban development.

TABLE 2
The number of inhabitants and the ethnic structure of Cluj, 1880–2002

Year of census	Number of inhabitants	Hungarians	%	Romanians	%
1880	31,813	23,434	73.6	4,962	15.6
1910	60,808	50,704	83.4	7,562	12.4
1930	100,844	54,776	54.3	34,836	34.5
1941	110,956	97,698	88.1	10,029	9.0
1956	154,723	74,200	47.9	74,600	48.2
1966	185,663	76,934	41.4	104,914	56.5
1992	328,602	74,871	22.8	248,572	75.6
2002	317,953	60,287	18.9	252,433	79.4

Source: Census data.

2) Other important changes have affected *the functional structure* of the city since 1989. In this process industrial areas have been restructured, new residential areas have emerged, some of the old residential quarters have been renewed, and others have been deteriorating. The historical district has been affected in this sense by three major processes:

- population loss;
- economic restructuring (marked by the growth of the service sector);
- changing image of public spaces.

The first process is determined by two factors: the suburbanisation of the population (i.e. out-migration) and the spatial relocation of the population due to the economic behaviour of the church. The residential function of the city has diminished since 1989, which is well illustrated by the values of population density. The density of population in Cluj was 100 inhabitants/ha in the 1970s, which decreased to 80 inhabitants/ha by 2000. As part of the new residential mobility pattern many people have moved to the suburban villages from Cluj. Suburbanisation has further been intensified by the economic activity of the church, which has led to the out-migration (re-location) of a growing number of tenants from their earlier dwellings and the replacement of the residential function by different service activities. The growing demand for office space, financial activities and other services with high floor-space needs in the inner city has had a crucial role in this process. In addition to the growing commercialisation the price of rent has also grown very fast, so that at present the monthly rent for one square meter office space in the historical district of Cluj reaches 50 EUR. In spite of this process, the inner-city still retains an important residential function, with almost 26,000 residents living in this area.

Another change related to the composition of population is a certain degree of ghettoisation in the inner city. It is partly connected to the social programme of the local authority, which offered public dwellings for families with many children and low income levels in the area. As a result, a certain number of historical buildings owned by the local authorities were rented out at low prices for socially weak families, the majority of the cases being Roma. Because of their low income level and the lack of preventing measures by the authorities many of these buildings became physically degraded, some of them totally destroyed. The best known case is “the house of the hangmen”, dating back to the 16th century. The boom of the service sector expanded to the ground floor units of the residential buildings in the first years of the transition, which was followed by the occupation of cellars and dwellings located on the first floors. In some cases whole buildings were converted. An exact calculation is hindered by the lack of data needed for the measurement of functional conversion; however, morphological mapping allows us to analyse the tendencies.

Suburbanisation started in the years 1995 and 1996, and has been growing ever since. In the meantime the relocation of service activities from the inner city to the suburban villages and the periphery of the city could also be observed. These processes are determined by two factors: the lack of free office and business space in the inner-city, and the huge demand for service activities in the city and the subsequent high level of rents.

A special law would give the opportunity for the local authorities to undertake actions or programmes for the conservation of the cultural heritage. It is the third section of the National Territorial Development Plan (Law No. 5/2000), which applies to protected zones, offering a list of cultural monuments. For the latter the law establishes the institution of 'protected zones', which is attributed to the local administration and the central authorities specialised in the field of monument protection. According to this law, local authorities had to carry out special studies and had to establish special protection zones for cultural monuments within 12 months (until 2001). However, that has not occurred in Cluj, neither special studies nor protection zones have been realised in Cluj to date.

6 Conclusions

One major conclusion of our study is that compared with the European urban development model described by several authors (e.g. *Enyedi*, 1988; *Kovács*, 2001, 2002), Cluj and Romanian cities in general have experienced some particularities and deviations from the classic urbanisation-suburbanisation-desurbanisation-reurbanisation model. The most intensive phase of urbanisation evolved later than in Western Europe (only in the late socialism), both suburbanisation and desurbanisation occurred late, only after the change of regime in 1989, while reurbanisation has not been observed yet. The historical districts of cities have a distinctive relation to the stages of urban development. At present in Cluj we can observe the decline of the inner-city population due to suburbanisation and (probably) to desurbanisation, while the gentrification process related to reurbanisation is not characteristic at all.

The liberalisation of the property market and the economic restructuring led to new spatial processes during the transition period, most notably segregation, social exclusion, polarisation, suburbanisation and deepening social tensions within the city. We can conclude that in the historical district of Cluj the following major social conflicts can be identified:

- the classic conflict between residential and commercial/service functions;
- social conflicts along ethnic and religious cleavages, related mostly to the symbolic use of public space;
- social conflicts related to the restitution process.

It can also be concluded that until 2005 there was no plan or strategy implemented for the management of social conflicts in the city. This is partly due to the lack of a comprehensive urban development plan, some social conflicts being sources of political legitimation. In this sense the Cluj case study proves to be a failure story. The restructuring of public spaces and their symbols have resulted in many changes in the historical district of Cluj, connected to the changing relationship between the upper level and local political power. For example, the changes of the names of places chronologically reflect the political changes. Six turning points can be identified in this respect, when a significant number of streets and squares in the historical district changed their official names, reflecting the spatial expressions of the new power groups. These are the second half of the 19th century, 1920, 1940, 1945, 1964 and 1989. The most frequently changing public place names (streets and squares) are located in the historical district and are connected to historical figures or events, frequently interpreted in different ways by Hungarian and Romanian history.

Although international literature emphasises the role of regional economies and urban regions as a basis of national competitiveness, we have found little evidence of it in our case study. The local elections of 2004 clearly indicated a further step into this direction but it is still far from the international experience. Maintaining or improving the competitiveness of cities and the focus on social sustainability has become a high priority in urban policy in Romania meanwhile. But the policies are weak, without concept and in written form they present little impact on the major spatial transformation processes. Little improvement has been made in the field of transport and communication infrastructure and even less with regard to the development of the physical and cultural attractions of cities. We expect a growing importance of cities both in the national and regional development plans in the framework of the European integration process, according to the priorities of the European Union's cohesion funds, as well. The following special problems of social sustainability and urban regeneration can be defined in Romanian cities:

- The new urban planning and policy made during the economic and political transition;
- The rapid privatisation of housing stock, urban land and services;
- Increasing autonomy of local governments, competences and tasks without sufficient financial background;
- The relative weakness of civil associations;
- Ethnic and religious cleavages.

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